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DEPT FOR WHA/CEN, PM/WRA, USSOUTHCOM FOR COMMANDER CRADDOCK  
AND POLAD MOORE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/03/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PARM](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#)  
SUBJECT: MOVING CLOSER TO MANPADS DESTRUCTION?

Classified By: Ambassador Paul Trivelli for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Conversations with representatives of the different political parties represented in Nicaragua's National Assembly reveal a claimed willingness from all sides to approve the destruction of another 651 MANPADS (leaving Nicaragua with an official stock of 400 MANPADS). Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN-PC) and Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) deputies told Southcom commander General Craddock that both parties are in favor of MANPADS destruction. Sandinista Front (FSLN) representatives reported that the FSLN may follow the Nicaraguan Army's recommendation to destroy more MANPADS in exchange for a political gesture or military equipment from the USG. Nicaraguan Minister of Defense Avil Ramirez confirmed that the Army is ready to act as soon as the Assembly approves the destruction. The visit of General Craddock and the continued pressure of Emboffs on all GON institutions have again brought the MANPADS issue to the fore and possibly pushed the National Assembly closer to action.  
END SUMMARY.

GENERAL CRADDOCK URGES DEPUTIES TO APPROVE MANPADS DESTRUCTION

12. (C) Southcom commander General Bantz Craddock, POLAD, and Ambassador met with representatives from the Nicaraguan National Assembly's Defense and Government Commission on April 21 to discuss defense and security issues. General Craddock urged the deputies to take the lead in approving the destruction of the next tranche of 651 MANPADS, as recommended by the Nicaraguan Army. He explained that states must restructure their security forces to face new transnational threats in the form of terrorists and traffickers of arms, drugs, and people. General Craddock pointed out that MANPADS are not useful in this new struggle, except as a weapon for terrorists, and are expensive to guard and maintain. He stated that the USG is ready to help Nicaragua with defense and security, but that the MANPADS form an obstacle to an enhanced relationship.

13. (C) The deputies, representing the ALN-PC, PLC and FSLN caucuses, essentially repeated their parties' established positions. Augusto Valle of the ALN-PC caucus agreed that the missiles are dangerous and can be used against civil targets, and pledged that the ALN-PC is fully in favor of destroying all of the MANPADS. He explained, however, that his party only controls 10% of the votes in the National Assembly, and that the Assembly's executive board (Junta

Directiva) must act on two bills previously submitted by the Defense Commission - one bill approves the destruction of 651 MANPADS; the other changes the small arms law to allow the approval with a simple majority, rather than a qualified (two-thirds) majority vote.

14. (C) Sandinista deputy Elias Chevez responded that the FSLN has not opposed MANPADS destruction as an anti-U.S. measure, but because at least some of them are needed for national defense. Chevez agreed that transnational threats are a problem, but stated that Nicaragua has border disputes with Colombia, Honduras, El Salvador, and Costa Rica. He described the situation as a "match" that could "ignite at any moment." Chevez argued that they have not seen any reciprocity from other Central American countries in terms of arms reduction - in fact the opposite has occurred. He added that the Army maintains very secure storage facilities. Chevez concluded that MANPADS destruction is not a "closed issue," and the FSLN respects the opinion of the Army that 651 could be eliminated without compromising national defense. He also implied that the FSLN may vote favorably if the USG offers the Army a "better deal" for the missiles.

15. (C) Chevez' fellow Sandinista, Jose Antonio Martinez, seconded Chevez' remarks and mentioned Honduras' increase in armed forces personnel and Nicaragua's conflict with Costa Rica over the Rio San Juan. Martinez argued that the Army is making do with obsolete Soviet-era equipment and requires the MANPADS to maintain the balance of power. He also indicated that we might reach an agreement over the MANPADS if the USG were to donate modern equipment to the Nicaraguan Army, "to fight drug traffickers, for instance." General Craddock responded that approval of destruction for the 651 MANPADS would be a positive first step and could lead to increased bilateral cooperation. Ambassador Trivelli also noted that General Craddock was about to attend a ceremony to donate a set of Zodiac boats to the Nicaraguan Navy.

16. (C) PLC deputy Roberto Sanchez implied that the cause of Nicaragua's most pressing security issues -- arms and drugs trafficking -- became serious during the Sandinista regime during the 1980s. He claimed that the policy of the PLC, as a "democratic party," is to try and resolve conflicts without the use of force. Sanchez stated that the PLC supports the destruction of the MANPADS and the initiative to change the small arms law.

#### MINISTER OF DEFENSE SUPPORTS MANPADS DESTRUCTION

17. (C) Before meeting with the National Assembly deputies, General Craddock discussed defense and security issues with Nicaraguan Minister of Defense Avil Ramirez. Ramirez was the first to broach the topic of the MANPADS, claiming that the GON is ready to "finish the action." He mentioned the General's meeting with the deputies and offered to repeat the Army's and Ministry's assessment that they should destroy another 651 MANPADS. Ramirez noted that "public opinion" is against elimination of MANPADS stocks given Nicaragua's border disputes and assured the General that Nicaragua's MANPADS are "safe and secure."

18. (C) General Craddock responded that the MANPADS are obsolete in terms of national defense and represent a danger to Nicaragua and the world. He urged Ramirez to explain to the Nicaraguan public that the armed forces need to restructure their capabilities to face the transnational threats of the 21st Century.

SANTOS: "WE NEED A GESTURE"

19. (C) Polcouns and poloff met with FSLN foreign affairs officer Samuel Santos the evening of April 21 to discuss MANPADS and other topics. Santos concurred with his colleagues on the Defense Commission that the FSLN is willing to abide by the Army's recommendation and destroy another 651

MANPADS. He stated that the FSLN would have to take into account the political optics of the vote and would expect a "gesture" on the part of the USG in exchange for approving the destruction. (Comment: In an earlier conversation with polcouns, Santos indicated that such a gesture could entail a positive statement from the USG regarding the FSLN action. End Comment.)

COMMENT: WE'VE HEARD IT ALL BEFORE

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¶10. (C) Several PLC representatives, including ex-president of the Defense Commission Fernando Avellan, have claimed that the PLC supports the destruction of the MANPADS. In 2005, the PLC argued that the Sandinistas were holding the MANPADS votes hostage using bureaucratic procedures through their control of the Junta Directiva presidency. In 2006, however, the PLC has failed to act on its promises, even though the Junta has a friendly president and a Liberal majority. The PLC continues to vacillate between unqualified support for MANPADS destruction and insisting that the USG not oppose an amnesty vote for convicted PLC leader Arnoldo Aleman in exchange for the approval. Whatever the PLC's true intentions, both bills remain dormant in the Junta Directiva. As they did in voting to pass CAFTA implementation, the Sandinistas might be willing to support the destruction of the 651 MANPADS. However, they are unlikely to support the destruction of the remaining 400.

¶11. (C) General Craddock and POLAD Moore cleared on this cable.  
TRIVELLI